

Vallejo's pulse strengthens as officials cheer reopening of two Mare Island dry docks

By Jessica A. York / Times-Herald

Brushing aside recent negative national press about Vallejo, Mayor Osby Davis on Friday morning needed only touch his wrist to forecast better things for the city.

"I feel a pulse, a heartbeat," Davis said before a crowd of about 300 gathered for Mare Island company Allied Defense Recycling's opening ceremony.

"The journey has been a wild one, but one you get to the end and say, 'wow, that was great,' " Davis added, describing the years leading to the return of major maritime activity at the former naval base.

The maritime company has leased two of the long-dormant dry docks for the enclosed dismantling of obsolete federal "mothball" vessels, and plans to expand to ship repair and construction in the future. Company officials have projected bringing more than 100 jobs to the community.

Friday's opening ceremonies were inside the cavernous Mare Island Building 680. They came two weeks after the arrival of the SS Solon Turman, part of a two-ship dismantling contract between Allied Defense Recycling and the Maritime Administration, which oversees vessels in the Suisun Bay Reserve Fleet moored near Benicia.

Joel Ayala, director of the governor's office of economic development, lauded the public-private partnership and the cost and environment savings expected from the opening of the first certified West Coast ship dismantling facility. More than a dozen ships from the fleet have been towed to Texas for recycling since October 2009.

"Today is truly a great day for everyone, except Texas," Ayala told the crowd, drawing laughter. "Thank you for restoring pride in the state of California."

Maritime Administrator David Matsuda congratulated the company on its opening, and "everyone who cherishes a cleaner Bay." He added that his agency is on schedule to recycle 20 mothballed vessels by Sept. 30 -- about 85 percent of the way to its goal.

Much of Friday's event centered around commendations for those involved in bringing the company to Mare Island over several years, from politicians to regulatory agency officials. Former Vallejo City Councilman Tom Barteel, who has since served as a district representative for former Sen. Pat Wiggins and now for Assemblyman Michael Allen, emceed the proceedings. The Hogan High School Navy Junior Reserve Officers Training Corps and the Jesse Bethel High School Band performed while a Mare Island Elementary School class observed the proceedings.

Resident Brenda Brumfield-Ross said she saw much portent in the new company's arrival.

"We're a phoenix rising out of the ashes," Brumfield-Ross said after the ceremony.